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7 January 1966

MEMORANDUM FOR: General Earle Wheeler /
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

As you know, a senior officer of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces has been announced as a member of Shelepin's mission to Hanoi. My people have prepared, jointly with DIA, an assessment of what this might mean, which I have attached for your use.

((signed) W. F. Raborn

W. F. RABORN

Attachment

WFR/mfb

Attachment is OCI 0755/66 dtd 7Jan66
"Role of Tolubko in the Shelepin
Delegation"

Identical letters to:
McGeorge Bundy
Secretary of State
Amb. L. Thompson
DepSecDef Vance
Secretary of Defense

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lcc - DCI Defense file w/cy attch.
lcc - DCI State file - no attch
lcc - DCI White Hs. file w/cy attch
lcc - DCI JCS file - no attch
lcc - ER w/cy basic
lcc - OCI via DDI - no attch.

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

ROLE OF TOLUBKO IN THE SHELEPIN DELEGATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

GROUP 1 Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification

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CIA-DIA MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Role of Tolubko in the Shelepin Delegation

1. Col. Gen. Tolubko, a member of Shelepin's delegation to Hanoi, has since May 1960 held the post of First Deputy Commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces. His presence on the delegation could be intended to suggest to the US that offensive missiles are slated to be introduced into North Vietnam.

2. It may be that Tolubko will brief the North Vietnamese on Soviet and American missile strength, and explain to the North Vietnamese why offensive missiles--which Hanoi may have requested--would not prove useful in the Vietnamese war. He could then return home hoping to have alarmed the US and thereby apply a check to further escalation. This may be the chief reason he was included, but his presence raises the possibility that the Soviet Union proposes, in the face of obvious risks and military limitations, to deploy to the DRV surface-to-surface missiles.

3. Damage to the DRV has thus far been limited more by US policy restraints than by Soviet-supplied air defense assistance. The DRV may feel that only a credible threat of retaliation against targets in South Vietnam would avert a further escalation of US attacks, that the way to save Phuc Yen and Hanoi is to threaten Da Nang and Saigon.

4. The Soviets have strong reasons for wanting to give extra help to the DRV at this time. Vietnam has become a critical issue in the Sino-Soviet dispute. The Soviets have been working hard to establish their influence in Hanoi. They might calculate that this new and dramatic form of aid would sufficiently strengthen their position so that Hanoi could be induced to disregard contrary Chinese advice and move toward negotiations on ending the war.

5. Transit rights across China would be required unless the USSR were willing to risk a repetition of the Cuban quarantine by attempting sea movement. The

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transport requirement would be extensive, involving not only missiles and their associated equipment, but Soviet missile troops and additional SAM equipment to defend the sites. The Soviets probably would see a good chance that China would refuse passage, confirming Soviet claims that they were willing to go to great lengths in support of North Vietnam but were blocked by Chinese obstructionism.

6. If, on the other hand, the Chinese agreed, the Soviets must consider that the US would eventually become aware that the USSR had deployed offensive missile units in North Vietnam. The US could not be sure that nuclear warheads had not been provided. But even with conventional warheads, the US would be conscious of a much deeper Soviet involvement.

7. There are potent negative arguments against the conjecture that the Soviets might adopt such a course of action. Moscow would have to recognize a considerable chance that the US would attack Soviet units in the DRV. And it lacks any ready response which would be both appropriate and limited. Without nuclear warheads, even a large number of missiles could not inflict serious damage on South Vietnam. But the sites would be vulnerable to detection and attack, and the USSR could not expect them to survive for long if they became involved in an exchange.

8. The Soviet leaders have left the clear impression that they have a realistic appreciation of the seriousness of US commitments in Vietnam and of the risks posed by a more direct and obvious Soviet involvement. The Soviet role to date has been marked by a concern with limiting the boundaries of Soviet assistance to the DRV and a determination to avoid any direct confrontation with the US. The Soviets have indicated that they are apprehensive over policies of the current US administration and the long-range implications for the USSR.

9. A more routine explanation can be offered for the inclusion of Tolubko in Shelepin's delegation. Tolubko's presence may merely be window-dressing. There is clearly a place for a top Soviet military official on any high level delegation to the DRV. Last February Air Marshal Vershinin,

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commander of the Soviet Air Force, accompanied Kosygin to Hanoi. The Kosygin mission did not lead to any significant commitment of Russian air force units in Vietnam. Tolubko may have been selected primarily to draw special attention to the Soviet strategic rocket forces and to underscore Moscow's contention that the defense of the Communist bloc essentially depends on the USSR's power. This line is aimed as much at Peking as at Washington and the Soviet leaders have demonstrated that they consider it an effective tool in the context of intensive Sino-Soviet rivalry for influence and credit both in Hanoi and throughout the Communist movement.

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